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When Love Fights

Sermon Preached March 10, 1918

by

Rev. GEORGE REID ANDREWS

of

St. Paul's Congregational Church
New York Avenue and Sterling Place
BROOKLYN, N. Y.

Inspired by your example
and teaching, Mr President
I have been helped to this
positive message. Let
me hope that you
will find time to
glance at the thoughts
herein presented

Yours for the Cause,

G. K. Adams.

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WHEN LOVE FIGHTS

Sermon preached by

Rev. GEORGE REID ANDREWS

of

ST. PAUL'S CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

New York Avenue and Sterling Place, Brooklyn, N. Y.

March 10, 1918

Lesson: Matt. 23: 13-33

Text: Matt. 27: 42—"He saved others; Himself he cannot save."

Last Sunday we considered the nature of the Christian God, taking for our text, "God Is Love," and found love the essence of His being. I wish to supplement that line of thought today with a sermon on the method of love, and our text is: "He saved others; Himself he cannot save." (Matt. 27: 42.) I am led to preach on this subject today for two chief reasons: first, lest I may have left a negative impression in your minds last Sunday, a thing hard to avoid; and in the second place, because the subject is receiving so much attention just now both in public and private discussions. You who have read the newspapers recently know of the stir caused by a series of lectures delivered at Columbia University under the auspices of the Y. M. C. A., notably the one by Dr. Robert E. Speer, in which he is accused of taking a stand detrimental to the morale of our country in this life-and-death struggle in which we are engaged. By the way, let me say that I do not for one moment doubt the sincerity and patriotism of Dr. Speer, nor many others who are held up for rebuke under the general charges of treasonable utterances, those who are said to speak too kindly and compromisingly of our enemies; whatever their opinions, their hearts are right, and in the long run that is of chief importance. Dr. Speer is thought to be one of those ministers of love who feel that their code of ethics is incompatible with the force of arms and do not take the stand one should take in the common defense and prosecution of the war. Such men are commonly known as pacifists.

The pacifists were much more numerous and vocal before the beginning of the war, particularly in the United States, than at the present time. General quietness reigns along the front, although an occasional gun is heard, as if to serve notice that demobilization orders have not been issued; the quietness is more of a truce than a cessation of hostilities. There has been no ex-

tensive change of heart, the truce being called for prudential reasons. Such confusion reigns in the camp of the pacifists that it is impossible to face the enemy with a solid fighting front. What fighting is done is after the fashion of guerilla warfare and single-handed combat. Those who have fallen out of the fight give various reasons for their inactivity. Some argue that force and love rule the world, force until love is ready; love is not yet ready, they say, and until it is, force must hold the day. Christianity is practicable ultimately but not yet sufficiently regnant in international affairs to maintain order and enforce law, the sword must yet be unsheathed. A similar line of argument is recognizable in the theory of the "interim ethic" (made in Germany), according to which there is inevitably an interim between the dethronement of force and the enthronement of love, during which interim it is necessary to resort to the rule of force. Still others argue that whatever their individual opinions may be or may have been before the war they have no right to express them now that they are members of a democracy, and as such it is their duty to submit to the will of the majority. The majority, through their duly constituted authorities, have voted to resist by force of arms, and every citizen, irrespective of his creed or color, must acquiesce in the popular will. There are those, moreover, who are confessedly confused; they are in the dark and find an unassertive attitude the prudential course. Somehow they hope and pray that in the stress and strain of battle the truth of God will emerge and men will learn in blood what they would not or could not learn in love. Further varieties I will not here detail, pausing only long enough to point out the one element common to them all. Whatever their superficial differences, at bottom, they all more or less vaguely feel that love and war are inherently irreconcilable. Such an attitude of confusion, compromise or suspended judgment is not very comfortable, especially if one is of the draft age, and certainly does not make for the best morale in soldier or citizen. Such a lurking sense of inconsistency weakens will and paralyzes action. It is a matter that has engaged my best thought for a decade and more, and one that has haunted me night and day since we entered this war. I have wanted to be a good citizen for my nation at war and at the same time I have wanted to be an enthusiastic and faithful ambassador of love. I have felt the need of a satisfactory solution to this perplexing question, the more since I became pastor of this church and found myself standing beside these twenty-four stars of service (pointing to Service Flag beside pulpit), and faced from Sabbath to Sabbath with anxious hearts seeking a word of comfort from me in the name of the Great Comforter.

In my desire to know the truth and to be faithful thereto, I have read widely and searchingly, I have talked with the representative men on both sides of the question in this city and elsewhere, but more or less in vain. Not one have I met who could give me a satisfactory answer to the pressing question, The Method of Love. On both sides I have talked with men whose names are known to you all to find them sincere and right in spirit, but each time I came away with the positive assurance that they were conscious of a lurking inconsistency between their program and their principles. An inconsistency gnaws at my heart strings, it cuts my motor nerves, and until I can get at least a working principle I cannot do my best work. Nor can you. If we would work enthusiastically and in the courage of conviction, our lips and lives must agree. For me the light has dawned. I come to you today with a positive message. It is the first time I have felt secure enough to declare myself in public on this subject. What follows is the result of years of patient study from experience, from history, and, most of all, from the life of Jesus. I speak from the courage of conviction with no lurking fear of compromise or inconsistency, and I pray you to follow me closely, and prayerfully.

Let us examine again and carefully the nature of love, believing as I do that when we understand its nature we shall not be confused as to its method. There are two aspects of love we must consider, love offensively and love defensively. The way in which love wins and the way in which love defends. There is a method of defense in love as well as that of offense, and the one is just as instinctive as the other. Pacifists and preachers of love have understood fairly well the method of love's offense. They have said, and rightly, that love wins by loving. We all learn by experience that love cannot be forced. What lover does not know that only by gentle wooing can the heart of his bride be won? "Love me," should he say, in commanding tone, he knows would surely repel her and freeze every swelling current of her soul. Love cannot be forced; it responds only to love. The initiates into the secret of love have understood the 13th chapter of I Corinthians. They have proven and know that love suffers long and is kind; love knows no jealously; love makes no parade, gives itself no airs, is never rude, never selfish, never irritated, never resentful; love is never glad when others go wrong; love is gladdened by goodness, always slow to expose, always eager to believe the best, always hopeful, always patient; love never fails. This was the way of the Master; He never commanded or drove, patiently and tenderly and lovingly he invited all who would to come unto Him for light and life. He undertook to show that

His burdens were light and His duties, privileges. As He sought to win the individual heart, He relied solely upon the gentle persuasiveness of love. And we succeed only as we use His method, inspired by His spirit. The heart of the heathen can be won to the gospel of love only as they see love incarnate in the lives of our missionaries going about doing good. In vain would we send books by the millions and homilies on love; they would serve only to gather dust on forgotten shelves. God so loved that He gave —so must we. The essence of love is selflessness. It gives all and so wins all.

But the defense of love has not been so well understood. At this point the confusion begins. Some hold that love makes no defense at all, that it wins by its defenselessness, that it wins by dying. The cross of Christ is the supreme example of this method of love's redemption by its death. According to orthodox Christianity generally, Christ came to die in order that He might defend His own. His defense was somehow conditioned on His death. He fought in order that He might die according to this view. This conception of the cross has had far-reaching consequences on the ethics of Christianity. It came to its completest expression in the Christian Church during the Middle Ages. One naturally thinks of the pathos and patience, resignation and longing, meekness and mildness, the inexpressibly sad gentleness and wistfulness portrayed by the artists of the day in the delineations of the Master. It is the sort of interpretation that holds before the devout Roman Catholic the Saviour in shocking immodesty, exposing his heart with his own hand. Our hymnology, for the most part, is inspired by this conception of vicarious love. Now I am not blind to the power and beauty of vicarious suffering and death. I know that the precious blood of the Saviour redeems the saved to a higher and purer life; but it is an indirect result of love. Love does not fight for the beloved in order that it may die. Love fights because of its passion for the object of its affection. Love may be killed in the defense, but it does not fight in order to be killed. It is just as natural for love to fight for the beloved as it is to win the beloved by wooing. If you have ever loved passionately, you will grant the truth of this statement at once. What mother would stop to consider a moment her own safety if the child of her heart was being abused by a ruffian. She might be killed, but she would not fight to be killed. What father? Do you suppose that I should hesitate a fraction of a second to fly to the rescue of my boy were he assailed by a brute? At the assailant's throat I'd fly, not counting the cost. A pistol held at my heart would not deter me a moment. Parental love would answer the cry of distress, instinctively using any and every

means at hand for his relief. Yes, love fights, and it fights fiercely and fearlessly for its own. That is why the wrath of offended love is so terrible. That is why parental wrath is so terrible toward the despoiler of a daughter beloved. That is why religious wars have been so cruel and ferocious. Offended love is instinctively wrathful and terrible in its defense. What must be the wrath of God, who is love, against the despoilers of His own.

Thus understanding the nature of love, we can understand the heart of Jesus who was the incarnate love of the Father. We can now understand the 23rd chapter of Matthew, which I read for our lesson. This chapter has been a stumbling block to students who read the life of Jesus, according to the 13th of I Corinthians only. They have been unable to reconcile the Jesus of the 23rd of Matthew with the Jesus of the Sermon on the Mount. The difference is too great. I read it for you, I hope, in something of the spirit in which it was uttered. I tried to make you feel its sting, feel its scathing rebuke. How could the meek and lowly Jesus, how could He who said, "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you;" who said, "Resist not evil, but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also;" who said, "If any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also." and who stood with hands down, let His enemies spit upon Him, beat Him, curse Him, nail Him to the cross, and as the cruel nails pierced his hands and feet, with his dying breath prayed, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do"—how could that Jesus stand before the most learned men of Israel and pronounce judgment against them with words that burn and blister: "Woe unto you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchers, which indeed appear beautiful outward but are within full of dead men's bones, and all filth. Ye blind guides which filter out gnats and swallow camels. Ye serpents, ye brood of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell!" The answer is to be found in the heart of Jesus. He loved God who is love; He loved his fellow man with a holy passion; and when He saw the lives of little children, widows and orphans being ground out by the leaders of Israel in the name of religion, it was too much for his loving heart; with a wrath proportionate to his love He pleaded and fought for them as love can and will.

This attack of His upon the leaders of Israel turned the battle upon Himself. And here the amazing thing happened; He offered no resistance whatever in word or act. He went to the cross without a murmur. For others He fought; for Himself He lifts not a finger nor will He let anyone else defend Him. Herein

has lain the problem. But it should not be a problem if we understand the nature of love. Love saves others; itself it cannot and will not save. It ceases to be love the moment self enters in Christianity is selflessness, after the spirit and example of its founder. This attitude of Jesus toward His own welfare is that wreckless abandon characteristic of love. During his brief ministry He had told his disciples not to fear for their own safety and He lived and died by his gospel. "He saved others; himself He cannot save."

The extreme pacifist, better spelled **passivist**, represented in the past by Count Tolstoy of Russia and by John Haynes Holmes of New York today who believe in and practice the gospel of non-resistance to the point even of saying that they would not resist a ruffian who might assail their wives on the street, has taken this attitude of non-resistance of Jesus toward his own personal offenders to mean no resistance to all offenders against our fellow man. Such an interpretation is to miss the whole tenor of Christianity both as taught and lived by Jesus. He did not fight for himself but he did fight unceasingly for others when they were set upon by cunning, cruel men. This false interpretation of the life and teaching of Jesus is at the foundation of all Christian pacificism of whatsoever variety. Jesus by example and precept bids us be careless about our own safety and comfort; but he bids us also fling ourselves unreservedly into the battle for our defenseless fellow man. He loved, therefore, he fought and fought to the finish.

The bearing of our thought upon the present national crisis must be evident to you at this point. A great deal is being said just now about the place of the pulpit in the nation's fight for liberty and international righteousness. An article by Mr. Joseph H. Odell in the Atlantic Monthly for February, 1918, dealing with this subject has created a great deal of discussion in the theological and popular world. I have read the article very carefully. Mr. Odell is right in spirit but he seems not to get down to the underlying principle that accounts for the attitude of the American pulpit. He arraigns the clergymen of the country of all the denominations for their apathy and lack of moral leadership. It is more condemnation and exhortation than a careful analysis of the existing situation and a prescription of remedies. He says the church is callous. If the church is callous it is because it is loveless. If the church refuses to fight it is because she does not love enough to fight, or does not understand that the things she loves are in imminent danger; if the church will not fight the offender, it is because she does not love sufficiently the offended. If the church loved enough and loved in particular she could not

help fighting; love protects her own. Mr. Odell speaks about her founder, the Christ, as the "Conqueror" and bids us conquer in his name and after his example. Conqueror is the wrong title for Jesus; it sounds too much like the loveless warrior who fights because he glories in battle. "Defender" is far better. Jesus Christ was the passionate defender of his beloved. He was fearless in the face of his foes and the cross because he was aflame with love for God and his fellow man. He was no hero, he was no conqueror, he was no lord; he was the great lover and therefore the great defender. He went to his death fighting for his own. He got a cross but not the "iron cross" of reward; it was the cross of love.

Do you ask me what accounts for the condition against which Mr. Odell raves? The answer is easy. First, we are scant of love. We have been selfcentered so long we cannot love much beyond ourselves. We do not love America in the way we should. We do not appreciate America. With all her imperfections we do not appreciate what she has done and is doing throughout the world for the cause of liberty and justice and the peace of righteousness. We do not know the passion that drove our forefathers to bleed and die for liberty, for justice, for democracy. The red in the Stars and Stripes means little to us. Robert G. Ingersoll once exclaimed, "Whoever saw men shoulder guns and go out in defense of boarding houses." Men who love home and friend and fireside alone know how to fight and will fight. They fight because they love. Too many American citizens are mere boarders; and no wonder they do not feel the call to fight. They do not fight because they do not love and they do not love because they have not given.

In the second place, we have little understood the foe that waits and fights like a lion to pounce upon our fair land and beloved. We have tried to believe that there is no longer in this world of civilization a nation so cruel or loveless as to want to snatch from us the cherished objects of our affection. We have only to listen to the wail of Belgium, the silent grief of France, the groans of Russia, the starving cries of Servia and Armenia to know what fate awaits us in the event of our defeat. The highway of the nations of which Isaiah fondly dreamed is not yet safe for the feet of our beloved; it is still infested with robbers and ravenous beasts and love must vigil keep and warfare make until in safety they may walk.

I fancy I hear the objection that this argument of mine is equally valid for the German as for the American, and the Belgian. In principle, yes, in practice, not. The Germans are fighting not because they love but because they must. They are fighting as

slaves, not as free men. They are the instruments of an irresponsible, autocratic war machine that fights for conquest and the glory of battle. Now I am sure there are thousands of Germans who have died and will die in the conviction that they were dying for fireside and Fatherland. We pity them the while we know that the conviction has been inspired through false alarms by that same war machine to achieve their sinister and selfish ends. We fight not because we must but because we may. In a sense we must; we are under the compulsion of love. We love our mothers, our wives, our children, our homes, and our fair land, and the more we love them the readier will we be to defend to the death. We could not fight so bravely did we not love so much.

What then is my message to the pulpits of America? What is to be the message of my pulpit? Not hate. We do not have to nor will we compose and sing our songs of hate. We will not preach hatred for anyone. Our message shall continue to be that of love, love for America, love for France, love for Belgium, love for Russia, love for liberty, love for justice, love for democracy, love for friend, yea, love for foe, love for wives, love for children, love for all that's good and noble, in short, love for God; and at the same time we will open the eyes of the strong and brave to the crouching, cruel enemy ready to pillage and murder, and to a man we'll rise, brave in the courage of love to do and to die, if need be, not counting the cost until in safety our beloved may dwell.

In concluding let us ask a very searching question that comes almost unconsciously to our lips. Must love always fight? Must Calvary ever stand in the path of love whether far or near? No! Thank God, No! There is a way out. It is the way of love. Love in its offense will secure its defense. Every heart will one day yield to it gentle sway and then in safety all may dwell. Patiently, tenderly, pleadingly, love will knock at every heart until every stronghold of sin and selfishness will capitulate and love reign supreme in every heart in every land. Until that day come she will defend her own as truly as she seeks to win her way to the uttermost parts of the world. The while we fight, therefore, we look to the dawning of that better day when the kingdoms of this world shall have become the kingdoms of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, when every heart subdued to his allegiance, there will be no need to fight for there will be non to offend. Perfect love casteth out all fear.

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